

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00
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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 7463

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, UR
SUBJECT: PODGORNYY'S FALL: FURTHER RUMORS AND SPECULATION

REF: (A) MOSCOW 7371, (B) MOSCOW 7373, (C) MOSCOW 7374
(D) STATE 120733

FOLLOWING IS OUR ROUNDUP OF MOST INTERESTING RUMORS AND
SPECULATION AS OF COB MAY 26:

1. FROM SOVIET CENTRAL COMMITTEE EMPLOYEE (WHO ACTS AS
LIASON BETWEEN CPSU AND SPD AND BETWEEN BREZHNEV AND FRG
CHANCELLOR SHCHMIDT - SOURCE IS NOT CONSIDERED COMPLETELY
RELIABLE) TO FRG EMBASSY: PODGORNYY OUSTED BECAUSE FOR
PAST YEAR OR TWO HIS GENERAL ATTITUDE WAS UNCOOPERATIVE,
EVEN OBSTRUCTIVE TO THE "GENERAL LINE." IN LEADERSHIP
MEETINGS HE WOULD FREQUENTLY CHALLENGE THE CONSENSUS:
"AREN'T WE GOING TOO FAR?". SPECIFICALLY, PODGORNYY
CALIMED THAT TOO MANY CONCESSIONS WERE BEING MADE TO
THE WEST, ESPECIALLY THE U.S. AND MORE ESPECIALLY ON SALT.
BACK IN 1973 HE WANTED TO DELIVER OFFENSIVE ARMS TO
EGYPT WHICH BREZHNEV OPPOSED.

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2. FROM FRENCH JOURNALISTS (INCLUDING AMALRIK OF
LE MONDE) PARTLY BASED ON SOVIET SOURCES: OUSTER
IS BREZHNEV'S REVENGE FOR PODGORNYY'S OPPOSITION
FROM PERIOD 1964-1966. PODGORNYY WAS INEFFICIENT,
DIDN'T REALLY DO MUCH ON RECENT AFRICAN TRIP, DURING
WHICH HE OFTEN FLUBBED HIS SPEECHES. RELATIONSHIP
WITH BREZHNEV HAD BEEN COOLING FOR SEVERAL MONTHS.

3. SOVIET MFA ESCORT TO VISITING AUSTRALIANS (MAY 25):
PODGORNYI HAD LONG SPOKE OF HIS DESIRE TO RETIRE.
AFRICAN TRIP TOOK A LOT OUT OF HIM PHYSICALLY.

4. AT MAY 26 POL COUNS MEETING (BRITISH, CANADIAN,
FRG, FRENCH AND ITALIAN) LINES OF SPECULATION
GENERALLY TRACKED WITH THOSE SET FORTH IN MOSCOW
7373. TENTATIVE CONSENSUS WAS THAT BREZHNEV WILL
TAKE PODGORNYI SLOT ALTHOUGH POSSIBILITY THAT IT WILL
BE FILLED BY KOSYGIN OR SOMEONE ELSE CANNOT BE
COMPLETELY DISMISSED. ASSUMING BREZHNEV TAKES IT,
OPINIONS DIFFER ON WHETHER HE MAY BE ALSO PREPARING
TO RETIRE AS PARTY CHIEF. ALL REMAIN PUZZLED
OVER WHAT TRIGGERED THIS SURPRISE BREAK IN THE
TROIKA GLACIER WITH POTENTIALLY FAR REACHING
IMPLICATION FOR BALANCE OF POWER AND RELATED
PATRONAGE -- A DEVELOPMENT TO BE ESPECIALLY AVOIDED
IN A JUBILEE YEAR WITH ITS EMPHASIS ON HARMONY AND
CONSENSUS.

5. THE MOST NOVEL SPECULATION OF THE DAY CAME FROM CHINESE
CHARGE WANG. EXPOUNDING HIS VIEWS AT LENGTH TO CHARGE AND
OTHER DIPLOMATS AT RECEPTION, WANG ARGUED THAT PODGORNYI
OUSTER IS PRODUCT OF BREZHNEV-SUSLOV RIVALRY AND A BREZHNEV
TACTIC TO REMOVE SUSLOV FROM SECRETARIAT. WANG'S SENARIO WOULD
HAVE BREZHNEV OFFERING SUSLOV CHAIRMANSHIP OF SUPREME SOVIET
PRESIDIUM, WHICH WOULD BE HARD TO REFUSE, THEN SECURING
HIS REMOVAL FROM SECRETARIAT, WHICH WOULD GIVE BREZHNEV
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FREER HAND IN THAT KEY BODY. WANG CONCEDED THAT IF NEW
CONSTITUTION ESTABLISHES A NEW CHIEF OF STATE
POSITION WITH REAL POWER, BREZHNEV WOULD TAKE IT HIMSELF, BUT
OPINED THAT IF HIGHER STATE ORGANS ARE UNCHANGED, SUSLOV IS THE
CANDIDATE TO BE KICKED UPSTAIRS SINCE HE IS THE "MOST
DANGEROUS" POTENTIAL RIVAL TO BREZHNEV.

6. WE CONTINUE TO BE STRUCK BY WILLINGNESS OF MOST SOVIETS
TO SPECULATE AND RANGE OF THEORIES ADVANCED. LATTER SEEMS
TO INDICATE THAT, AS YET, NO OFFICIAL GUIDANCE HAS BEEN
PROVIDED TO MIDDLE-LEVEL OFFICIALS.
MATLOCK

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